Published and Copyright (c) 1999 - 2006
All Rights Reserved

Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

Kevin Savetz

To subscribe to A-ONE, change e-mail addresses, or unsubscribe,
log on to our website at: www.atarinews.org
and click on "Subscriptions".
OR subscribe to A-ONE by sending a message to: dpj@atarinews.org
and your address will be added to the distribution list.
To unsubscribe from A-ONE, send the following: Unsubscribe A-ONE
Please make sure that you include the same address that you used to
subscribe from.

To download A-ONE, set your browser bookmarks to one of the
following sites:

http://people.delphiforums.com/dpj/a-one.htm
Now available:
http://www.atarinews.org

Visit the Atari Advantage Forum on Delphi!
http://forums.delphiforums.com/atari/

=~=~=~=

A-ONE #0850 12/15/06

~ Data-Privacy Laws Push ~ People Are Talking! ~ Firefox 3 Alpha!
~ mXtreme Falcon Speeder ~ Send E-Cards This Year ~ SatanDisk Is Ready!

~ Romanian Web Fraud Bust ~ Cybercrime Students! ~ Pat's QB Sues Yahoo
~ Instant Messaging Gap! ~ What Is "Rock Phish"? ~ New MyAES Update!

-* Vista's Registration Hacked! *-
-* Net Neutrality Bill Doesn't Pass! *-
-* French Group Attacks PC Software Bundling! *-

=~=~=~=

->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Happy Hanukkah to all who celebrate. The start of another holiday season is upon us. We hope that everyone is having an enjoyable season. Here in New England, the temperature has been in the 50's, and no sign of snow in sight!! For those who enjoy the cold and snow, head north!! On my way back from a few errands today, I drove past my local golf course just to see if there were any diehards out. The parking lot was packed!! I was tempted to go home and grab my clubs, but I resisted the temptation.

Well, I don't have much to say this week, so I'll close out here. Good luck with your holiday shopping - I'm finished!!

Until next time...

=~=~=~=

SatanDisk Preorder & mXtreme Cancellation

Miro Kropacek has announced:

At first I m happy to announce the long awaited project, SatanDisk, is ready for production. Main features:

- direct connection between ACSI and MMC/SD card slot
- plug'n'play
- about 120 KB/s transfer speed
- MMC card support (SD cards aren't supported to this time)
- HDDRIVER compatible

The prize is very low (about 35 Euro). You need to register at project homepage, login and enter your preorder. The number of preorders isn't limited in any way but in some extreme low number we have to increase the prize (and vice versa).

Don't forget SatanDisk is completely open-source based so all schematics, firmware etc is available on project homepage for your custom build.

Secondly, I want to announce the cancellation of mXtreme project since

there’s much better option -- PhantomS (see news on atari.org server). In fact, we’re happy Petr decided to do such step since we can focus on another things (i.e. coding software for Falcons). The prize is very cool (1/3 of mXtreme), it’s already done and in the end it’s nearly the same as we planned mXtreme. I can only recommend you this piece of hardware!

URL: http://ihrisko.org/~mikro/sd_preorder
AUTHOR: Miro Kropacek

mXtreme - New Nemesis/Phantom-like Falcon Speeder

Miro Kropacek has announced:

We decided to produce Falcon speeder similar to Nemesis/Phantom in the past. This speeder allows you to set resolutions like 800x608/256 colours or 640x480/hicolour, it speeds up DSP, CPU, FPU, Videl up to 36%. Your Falcon will move much better! It’s 100% compatible with CT60/63 and 99% compatible with original Falcon030.

We need at least 50 pre-orders. The prize is 100 Euro. For more details look at homepage bellow.

URL: http://satantronic.atari.sk/mxtreme/

MyAES 0.84

Hello

You can find MyAES 0.84 AES for Mint or able to run above any other AES in multitask env (Magic, NAES, XaAES ...)

http://myaes.lutece.net/

Olivier

=~=~=~=

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

[Rumors abound that Joe’s column this week has been delayed to his being tied up somewhere at the North Pole, helping out some senior citizen in a big red suit and some weird-looking deer.]

=~=~=~=

->In This Week's Gaming Section - Nintendo Sued for Wiimote Trigger!
Advocacy for Game Rating System!
Religious Game Violence!
And more!

=~=~=~=

->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Nintendo Sued for Wiimote Trigger

While Nintendo Wii gamers are having a smashing good time with one of this holiday season's hottest-selling game consoles, Nintendo is being hit with a lawsuit over the Wii's uniquely designed controllers.

Interlink Electronics is suing the Japan-based game maker over the Wii remote's trigger button, which Interlink claims is based on its own patented design.

Interlink said it will seek compensation for "loss of reasonable royalties, reduced sales, and/or lost profits as a result of the infringing activities."

According to the complaint, the Wii remote - called the "Wiimote" by Nintendo - has a trigger on its underside that infringes on Interlink patent number 6,850,221 for a "Trigger Operated Electronic Device," which Interlink claims to have secured on February 1, 2005.

Interlink is seeking a jury trial.

It might come as somewhat of a surprise that the first lawsuit over the Wii's innovative motion-sensing controller is from a patent-infringement case. That is because some gamers are finding the controller is causing damage to televisions, windows, and even other users.

The so-called "flying Wiis" have led Nintendo to launch an investigation after receiving reports of problems with the strap that secures the machine's wand-like remote controller to the player's wrist, according to the company.

Videos of flying controls smashing living room windows and cracking television screens are popping up on Web sites like YouTube and MySpace. Now, Nintendo is looking to stem the tide of negative publicity before it gets out of hand - so to speak.

"Some people are getting a lot more excited than we'd expected," Nintendo President Satoru Iwata said in a statement last week. "We need to better communicate to people how to deal with Wii as a new form of entertainment."

The problems have not seemed to slow sales of the popular game console, as Nintendo continues to report they are moving at a brisk pace. The company is now considering raising its sales target for the Wii, which has been selling out at retailers since it went on sale recently in the U.S. and Japan.

Nintendo has shipped some 400,000 Wii machines in Japan and more than 600,000 in North America.

If history is any guide to the potential success or failure of Interlink's suite, small firms have built up an impressive track record against game makers regarding patent infringement.

In 2002, for example, Immersion sued Microsoft and Sony over the vibration feature in the Xbox and PlayStation controllers. Immersion settled with Microsoft for some $26 million and won a court decision against Sony for $80 million.

Nintendo To Replace Wii Straps, Japan DS Adapters

Nintendo Co. Ltd. said on Friday it will voluntarily exchange 3.2 million straps for its "Wii" game console controller following reports of damaged TVs and minor physical injuries caused by flying "Wiimotes."

The company behind video game characters such as Donkey Kong and Super Mario said it is replacing existing Wii remote straps with a wider, stronger version.

Individually packaged Wiimotes purchased after December 18 will have the new 1 mm cord.

The Wii competes with Sony Corp.'s PlayStation 3 and Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox 360. Its motion-sensitive controller allows users to direct on-screen play by swinging the device like a tennis racket or wielding it like a sword.

The Wii's new intuitive and interactive game play has captivated consumers and the problems with the straps have been chronicled on a popular and often amusing blog, WiiHaveAProblem.com.

Nintendo said customers who want to exchange straps can call toll-free at (800) 859-4519 between 6 a.m. and 7 p.m. Pacific time, or visit the company's Web site at www.support.nintendo.com.

Nintendo also said it would replace about 200,000 AC adapters for its hot-selling DS and DS Lite handheld game machines in Japan, because they may overheat and cause burns on rare occasions. No related injuries had been reported so far, the Kyoto-based game maker said on Friday.

Nintendo of America said it has not received a single report of product failure or consumer injury.

The adapter program is expected to cost between 100 million yen and 200 million yen ($848,600-$1.7 million) and it is yet to be decided how the cost will be divided between Nintendo and the supplier of the AC adapter, Nagano Japan Radio Co. Ltd. The strap exchange is expected to cost Nintendo several

hundred million yen, the company said. The adapter and strap replacements will probably have little effect on earnings, the company added.

For the year to March 2007, Nintendo forecast operating profit of 145 billion yen on sales of 740 billion yen.

Prior to the announcement, Nintendo shares closed up 3.6 percent at 29,420 yen, outperforming the Nikkei average, which gained 0.51 percent.

Group Advocates Video Game Rating System

With the holiday shopping season underway, an industry group for video games is trying to encourage parents to use its voluntary ratings to protect children from graphic images of sex and violence.

The Entertainment Software Rating Board said Thursday it would distribute four public-service television spots to more than 800 broadcast and cable stations nationwide.

"Just like movies and TV shows, video games are created for a diverse audience of all ages, and some are simply not intended for children," ESRB president Patricia Vance said.

Sens. Joe Lieberman, D-Conn., and Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y., lent their support at a Capitol Hill news conference. Both have been active in the fight to protect children from sexually explicit and graphically violent videos, music and movies.

Lieberman said parents must play a central role in learning about the ratings and what games their children should be playing.

"Ultimately, this is about parents exercising some responsibility," Lieberman said.

Vance said about 12 percent of the games the ESRB rates each year are M-rated, intended for those aged 17 and over. She said parents should take such ratings seriously in deciding if the content of the game is appropriate for their child.

Executives from retailers Best Buy Co. and GameStop Corp. appear in the ads, stressing their support for ratings and their store policies not to sell M-rated games to children under 17 without parental permission.

The ESRB rating system was created in 1994 by the entertainment software industry. Use of the ESRB seal and rating is voluntary, though virtually all games do so.

New Video Game "The Shivah" Is First To Star Rabbi

While Christian games like the newly released "Left Behind: Eternal Forces" gain mainstream attention, Manifesto Games in New York City is billing "The Shivah" as the first to star the leader of a Jewish congregation.

In the murder-mystery game named after the Jewish mourning ritual,

protagonist Rabbi Stone is having a crisis of faith and his congregation on New York’s Lower East side is losing members and cash.

When he inherits a small windfall from a controversial congregant, Rabbi Stone must solve the mystery behind the gift and make sure it is not cursed.

Manifesto, which announced the title via e-mail, said "The Shivah" plays on personal computers and is the first commercial game from creator Dave Gilbert.

Representatives from Manifesto, which sells downloadable games, were not immediately available for comment. "The Shivah" sells for $5.

Video Game Glorifies Violence

Targeted largely at conservative Christians, it’s a violent video game with a difference: Combatants on one side pause for prayer, and their favored interjection is "Praise the Lord."

Critics say "Left Behind: Eternal Forces" glorifies religious violence against non-Christians. Some liberal groups have been urging a boycott, and on Tuesday they urged Wal-Mart to withdraw the game from its shelves.

However, Troy Lyndon, CEO of Left Behind Games Inc., defended the game as "inspirational entertainment" and said its critics were exaggerating. He expressed greater concern about poor reviews from some video-game aficionados, saying the company would offer a free technical upgrade by Dec. 24.

Lyndon’s company, based in Murrieta, Calif., has a license to develop games based on the popular "Left Behind" novels, a Bible-based end-of-the-world-saga that has sold more than 63 million copies.

Lyndon, in a telephone interview, said "Eternal Forces" has been distributed to more than 10,000 retail locations over the past four weeks. He said sales were going well, but declined to give specifics.

The real-time strategy game has received a T (for teen) rating, as its makers had hoped. It offers more violence than an E-rated children’s game, but less graphically than M (for mature) rated games that have often been criticized by conservative Christian groups.

"Our game includes violence, but excludes blood, decapitation, killing of police officers," the company says on its Web site, noting that a player can lose points for "unnecessary killing" and regain them through prayer.

The game’s story line game begins after the rapture, when most Christians are transported to heaven. Earth’s remaining population is faced with a choice of joining or combatting the Antichrist, as embodied by a force called the Global Community Peacekeepers that seeks to impose one-world government.

The game’s critics depict the ensuing struggle, set in New York City, as one fostering religious intolerance.

"Part of the object is to kill or convert the opposing forces," said the

Rev. Tim Simpson of Jacksonville, Fla., who heads the Christian Alliance for Progress. "It is antithetical to the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

Simpson, whose group was formed last year to counter the influence of the religious right, joined in a news conference Tuesday at which he and other speakers urged Wal-Mart to discontinue sales of "Eternal Forces".

Wal-Mart indicated it would continue selling the game online and in selected stores where it felt there was demand.

"The product has been selling in those stores," said spokeswoman Tara Raddohl. "The decision on what merchandise we offer in our stores is based on what we think our customers want the opportunity to buy."

The game’s makers contend that the violence from the good side, the Tribulation Force, is exclusively defensive, and should not be seen as contrary to church teachings.

"Christians are quite clearly taught to turn the other cheek and to love their enemies," the company Web site says. "It is equally true that no one should forfeit their lives to an aggressor who is bent on inflicting death."

Lyndon said he and his fellow executives hoped to ease critics’ concerns. "They’re good-minded people," he said. "They want to keep us from making games that are jihad in the name of God."

Simpson, a Presbyterian Church USA pastor, said he was dismayed by the concept in "Eternal Forces" of using prayer to restore a player’s "spirit points" after killing the enemy.

"The idea that you could pray, and the deleterious effects of one’s foul deeds would simply be wiped away, is a horrible thing to be teaching Christian young people here at Christmas time," Simpson said.

Anther participant in the critics’ news conference, author Frederick Clarkson, argued that "Eternal Forces", though less violent than many other video games, was more troubling in some ways.

"It becomes a tool of religious instruction," he said. "The message is. ... there will be religious warfare, and you will target your fellow Americans, people from other faiths, people who you consider to be sinners."

Clarkson faulted Focus on the Family, a Colorado-based Christian ministry often critical of violent video games, for publishing a positive review of "Eternal Forces" on one of its Web sites.

"Eternal Forces is the kind of game that Mom and Dad can actually play with Junior and use to raise some interesting questions along the way," wrote the reviewer, Bob Hoose.

Other online reviewers, writing for hardcore gamers, have been less impressed.

"Don’t mock ’Left Behind: Eternal Forces’ because it’s a Christian game. Mock it because it’s a very bad game," wrote GameSpot reviewer Brett Todd.

=~=~=~=

A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

High-Tech Firms To Push Data-Privacy Law

Microsoft Corp., Hewlett-Packard Co. and other high-tech companies are preparing to push for data-privacy legislation next year to replace what they consider an outdated patchwork of state and federal laws that are inconsistent and burdensome.

"We think the time has come for a comprehensive privacy bill that would protect consumers' personal information while still allowing the flow of information needed for commerce online," Ira Rubinstein, a Microsoft lawyer, said this week.

Several recent high-profile breaches of consumers' personal information have made consideration of privacy proposals more likely, Rubinstein said. The Social Security numbers and medical data of approximately 930,000 people were compromised this June, for example, when computer equipment belonging to insurance provider American International Group Inc. was stolen.

Microsoft, HP and eBay Inc. earlier this year formed the Consumer Privacy Legislative Forum to lobby for privacy legislation. Google Inc., Intel Corp., Oracle Corp. and other companies later joined.

The forum supports legislation that would set standards for what notice must be given to consumers about personal information collected on them and how it will be used, Rubinstein said. The companies are aiming for a law that would override any existing state laws and standardize privacy rules across industries.

The group's efforts will likely face some opposition, however.

Marc Rotenberg, executive director of the Electronic Privacy Information Center, a consumer advocacy group, said the proposals, if adopted, would amount to an industry drafting its own regulations.

Rotenberg also argued that the notices to consumers preferred by Microsoft and other companies are insufficient to protect online privacy. Instead, consumers should have access to the data that companies have on them and have more control over how they are used, he said, similar to the way consumers can currently access their credit reports.

Rotenberg also opposes the pre-emption of state laws, which he said in many cases have better protections than federal rules. Many anti-spam experts complained when Congress in 2003 approved a measure that did not let individuals sue spammers and that pre-empted most state laws that did.

Meanwhile, Stuart Ingis, a partner at the law firm Venable LLP, said that a broad privacy measure is unnecessary.

"Comprehensive privacy legislation already exists in this country," he said, citing existing laws and regulations governing financial and health-care privacy.

Those rules took decades to develop and provide strong protections for consumers, said Ingis, whose firm represents several companies and trade groups that track privacy issues.

Although high-tech companies have been seeking comprehensive federal privacy legislation, Congress has focused on the steps companies should take to protect data and when companies should notify consumers of data security breaches.

But several data security bills failed to pass during the soon-to-end congressional session, largely because of jurisdictional struggles between different congressional committees, said Steve Adamske, spokesman for Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass.

Frank, incoming chairman of the House Financial Services Committee, said Wednesday that he plans to consider the issue of data security next year. To avoid a repeat of the jurisdictional struggle, Frank says he plans to propose to incoming House Speaker Nancy Pelosi that she appoint a task force of members from committees with oversight on privacy matters to work on the issue.

Congress Fails to Pass Net Neutrality Bill

The U.S. Congress has adjourned without passing a much-debated broadband bill or strengthening network neutrality rules.

The wide-ranging broadband bill would have streamlined the franchising process that telecom companies such as AT&T and Verizon Communications need to go through to offer Internet Protocol-based television service in competition with cable TV.

But advocates of net neutrality rules pressed Congress to hold on to the broadband bill unless it included a provision prohibiting broadband providers from blocking or slowing competing Internet content.

Congress’s failure to pass the broadband bill "shows the power of the issue with net neutrality," says Jim McGann, spokesperson for the It’s Our Net Coalition, a group calling for a net neutrality law. "Some lawmakers ignored net neutrality at their peril."

Democrats take control of both the Senate and the House of Representatives when Congress reconvenes in January, and the prospects for a wide-ranging broadband bill may be diminished. Republicans have generally pushed for the bill, while many Democrats have raised objections based on concerns about the lack of net neutrality rules and about provisions that they have said would allow the telecom providers to skip poor areas with their new television services.

The House version of the broadband bill would have required VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) providers to offer customers enhanced 911 emergency dialing service, and it would have allowed municipal governments to offer broadband data and video services. The Senate version would have

permanently extended a moratorium on Internet-only taxes such as access taxes.

Net neutrality advocates will continue to press Congress to pass a law protecting open access on the Internet, McGann says, although he declines to speculate on its chances in the new Congress. "We're going to, as much as we can, educate members about the issue," he says.

The broadband bill will also lose a major champion in Congress next year. Verizon, one of the large broadband providers pushing for streamlined video franchising rules, will refocus its efforts on state legislation next year, a company spokesperson says. In addition, Verizon is watching the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which may also act on broadband regulations, says David Fish, a Verizon spokesperson.

"The federal campaign raised the issue to a higher visibility," Fish says. "We've made big strides toward video choice this year, and expect continued progress in 2007."

Beyond the broadband bill, some tech groups say Congress's post-election lame-duck session produced mixed results. In its final days Congress approved an extension of a research and development tax credit, which allows U.S. companies to get a tax break of up to 10 percent of R&D spending. The credit expired in 2005, and many tech groups called on Congress to reinstate it so that the U.S. could stay competitive with other countries offering R&D tax breaks. Congress approved an extension through the end of 2007, even though some tech groups want the tax credit to be made permanent.

Congress also approved an expansion that could add $1 billion to $2 billion to the program, which has cost about $7 billion a year.

Mozilla Ships Alpha Release of Firefox 3.0

Mozilla today hit an early milestone on the road to the next version of its open-source browser, but the final product is still a year away, developers say.

The Mozilla team released its first alpha release of Firefox 3.0 today, giving Firefox and Web application developers an early look at the next-generation browser. This release is not intended for regular users, not even those who like to play around with early versions of a product, Mozilla said.

The software, code-named Gran Paradiso, comes just six weeks after Mozilla shipped version 2.0 of the browser, but it has already been more than a year in development, according to Mike Schroepfer, Mozilla's vice president of engineering.

The final version of Firefox 3.0 is expected to be released by the end of 2007.

Developers hope that it will be a major step toward making Web applications indistinguishable from programs that are installed on the desktop, Schroepfer said.

Gran Paradiso features better support for a number of graphics standards,

such as the Scalable Vector Graphics (SVG) language and the Canvas specification, Schroepfer said. "These are fairly major architectural changes to enable us to improve performance."

Firefox 3.0 also supports the Cairo graphics library, which aims to make Web pages look the same whether they are being printed or viewed on a Windows PC, a Macintosh, or a small-screen device.

The Firefox 3.0 plan calls for browsing, bookmarking, and privacy enhancements to be built into the browser, but Schroepfer said there is still a lot of time to work out new features. "It’s a bit early to be talking about the user-facing features," he said.

French Consumer Group Attacks PC Software Bundling

France’s leading consumer watchdog said on Thursday it would take computer maker Hewlett-Packard Co. and two retailers to court to unbundle software from personal computers sold in their stores.

"It is impossible for consumers to buy ’clean’ computers and then later themselves choose freely the software they want to install on their equipment," UFC-Que Choisir said in a statement.

"Above and beyond the question of principle, the economic factor is non-negligible because today software can represent 10 to 20 percent of the price of a computer," it added.

It named the retailers in the case as Darty, part of Britain’s Kesa Electricals Plc, and privately-held Auchan, France’s third largest retailer.

Neither of the retailers nor Hewlett-Packard in France were immediately available for comment.

UFC-Que Choisir legal officer Sandra Wouhling said current practice effectively forced ordinary consumers to buy computers using Microsoft operating systems whereas companies and administrations were offered a real choice.

She said the cases could take one to one and half years to come to a conclusion and involved several commercial courts, in Paris for Darty, in Bobigny for Auchan and in Nanterre for Hewlett-Packard.

Pirates Hack Vista’s Registration Features

Hackers are distributing a file that they say lets users of the corporate version of Microsoft’s Windows Vista operating system get around the software’s anti-piracy mechanisms.

Windows Vista must be "activated," or authorized by Microsoft, before it will work on a particular machine. To simplify the task of activating many copies of Vista, Microsoft offers corporate users special tools, among them Key Management Service (KMS), which allows a company to run a Microsoft-supplied authorization server on its own network and activate

Vista without contacting Microsoft for each copy.

The software Microsoft.Windows.Vista.Local.Activation.Server-MelindaGates lets users spoof that KMS process, allowing them to activate copies of the enterprise editions of Vista, its creators say. The hacked download is available online on sites including The Pirate Bay and other file sharing sites.

Microsoft's official KMS offering is available to customers with 25 or more computers running Vista. The machines activate the software by connecting to the KMS server, and must reactivate every six months.

KMS is not the only option that enterprises have for volume activation of Vista: they can also call Microsoft by phone or connect over the Internet to activate the software.

The MelindaGates hack allows users to download a VMware image of a KMS server which activates Windows Vista Business/Enterprise edition, its creators claim. Microsoft did not respond to requests for comment on the hack.

Vista is the first Windows operating system that requires volume users to activate each product. The new activation processes are aimed at reducing piracy.

While one security expert said he isn't surprised that KMS has been cracked, he said the MelindaGates hack offers some insight into piracy.

"This also shows how piracy is not just about kids swapping games," said Mikko Hypponen, chief research officer of F-Secure. "The only parties that would need a KMS crack would be corporations with volume licensing."

Internet Gangs Hire Students For Cybercrime

Organized gangs have adopted "KGB-style" tactics to hire high-flying computer students to commit Internet crime, a report said on Friday.

Criminals are targeting universities, computer clubs and online forums to find undergraduates, according to Internet security firm McAfee.

Some gangs have sponsored promising students from other disciplines to attend computer courses before planting them in businesses as "sleepers."

McAfee said the students write computer viruses, commit identity theft and launder money in a multi-billion dollar industry that is more lucrative than the drugs trade.

The gangs' tactics echo the way Russian agents sought out experts at trade conferences or universities during the Cold War, the company said in an annual report.

"Although organized criminals may have less of the expertise and access needed to commit cybercrimes, they have the funds to buy the necessary people to do it for them," the report says.

McAfee said its study was based partly on FBI and European intelligence. In Eastern Europe, some people are lured into "cybercrime" because of high

unemployment and low wages.

"Many of these cybercriminals see the Internet as a job opportunity," McAfee quoted FBI Internet security expert Dave Thomas as saying. "With low employment, they can use their technical skills to feed their family."

Hackers are paid to write computer viruses that can infect millions of machines to discover confidential information or send unwanted "spam" emails.

This "spyware" can detect credit card numbers or other personal information which is then used by fraudsters.

Criminals trawl through social networking Web sites which allow people to leave their pictures and personal details.

Their research helps them to target "phishing" attacks, where people are sent fraudulent emails to trick them into revealing credit card numbers.

Hackers are increasingly hired to spy on businesses, McAfee said. "Corporate espionage is big business," it added.

U.S. Indicts 21 Over Romanian-based Internet Fraud

U.S. officials on Tuesday announced the indictment of 21 people accused of bilking eBay bidders out of $5 million through an Internet fraud scheme that originated in Romania.

The operation contacted people who had unsuccessfully bid on items for sale on the online auction site, telling them they had a second chance to obtain the items if they wired money to addresses in the Chicago area where the seller’s agent would complete the transaction.

The money was divided between operatives in the United States and Romania and the buyers got nothing in return.

"This case is an example of using new technology to commit an old-fashioned fraud scheme," said Patrick Fitzgerald, the U.S. attorney in Chicago. "There is no refuge in cyberspace for those who use the Internet to cloak and facilitate criminal activity as law enforcement is becoming ever more adept at investigating cyber-crime."

About 2,000 people were victimized across the United States between November 2003 and August 2006, the announcement said.

Each of the 21 people was charged with one count of wire fraud. Most were from the Chicago area and all but six have been taken into custody, it added. Investigators said half or more of the fraudulently obtained money was sent to conspirators outside the United States, most of them believed to be living in Romania.

Who or What Is ’Rock Phish’ and Why Should You Care?

The first thing you need to know about Rock Phish is that nobody knows

exactly who, or what, they are.

Wikipedia defines the Rock Phish Kit as "a popular tool designed to help nontechnical people create and carry out phishing attacks," but according to security experts, that definition is not correct.

They say that Rock Phish is actually a person, or perhaps a group of people, responsible for as much as one-half of the phishing attacks being carried out these days.

Why should you care? Phishers try to trick Internet users into divulging sensitive information on phony Web pages made up to look like a bank site or an online shopping site. It’s a type of attack that is becoming very lucrative.

Research firm Gartner estimates that phishers will cost U.S. businesses and consumers a whopping $2.8 billion this year. The average take: $1244 per victim.

No one can say for sure where Rock Phish is based, or whether the group operates out of a single country.

"They are sort of the Keyser Soze of phishing," says Zulfikar Ramzan, senior principal researcher with Symantec’s Security Response group, referring to the secretive criminal kingpin in the 1995 film The Usual Suspects. "They’re doing some pretty scary things out there," he adds.

This criminal organization first appeared in late 2004 and was given the name "Rock Phish" because the URLs (Uniform Resource Locators) on the group’s fake sites included a distinctive subdirectory named "rock," a technique the group abandoned once phishing filters began looking for the word.

Since then it has grown to be one of the most prominent phishing groups in operation. It has developed a variety of new attack techniques that have earned the group a kind of grudging respect among security professionals, several of whom declined to be interviewed on the record for this story for fear of being physically harmed. They estimate that the criminal organization’s phishing schemes have cost banks more than $100 million to date.

Rock Phish is not known for focusing on the two most popular phishing targets, eBay and PayPal. Instead it specializes in European and U.S. financial institutions. At last count the group had spoofed 44 brands from businesses in nine countries, sending out e-mail messages that try to trick victims into visiting phony Web sites and entering information such as credit card numbers and passwords. Rock Phish sites have spoofed Barclays, Citibank, Deutsche Bank, and E-Trade, among others.

Security experts estimate that Rock Phish is responsible for between one-third and one-half of all phishing messages being sent out on any given day. "They are probably the most active group of phishers in the world," says Dan Hubbard, senior director of security and technology research with Websense.

What causes particular concern among security experts such as Hubbard is Rock Phish’s ability to stay one step ahead of both security products and law enforcement.

For example, according to security experts Rock Phish pioneered image

spam, the technique of sending e-mail messages in graphic files in order to bypass spam filters.

And just as browser makers have been building phishing filters into their products, the group has begun creating unique URLs for its phishing messages to get around blacklists of known phishing addresses.

These single-use URLs make it extremely difficult for antiphishing researchers to identify and block phishing pages, Symantec’s Ramzan says.

This is bad news for products such as the Firefox browser, which uses a blacklist. "Ultimately, technologies that rely heavily on blacklists are going to be useless," Ramzan says.

Rock Phish has contributed to a surge in the number of phishing Web sites over the past few months, according to the Anti-Phishing Working Group. In August the group counted 19,000 phishing URLs. By October, the most recent month for which data is available, that number had nearly doubled to 35,000.

Security experts guess that Rock Phish is run by an extremely small group of technically savvy criminals - probably about a dozen hackers - who set up the phishing Web sites, manage the domain name registration, and ensure that the stolen financial information is funneled into a central server, which researchers call the "Mother Ship."

This group then sells the credit card and banking information in Internet-based chat rooms to a much wider range of money launderers who actually extract money from these accounts, according to researchers who asked not to be identified.

Rock Phish uses a network of hacked computers to redirect Web visitors to the Mother Ship, and the group has been particularly adept at exploiting the decentralized nature of the Internet for its illegal activity. One successful trick has been to register new phishing addresses in little-used country domains - Sao Tome and Principe (.st) and Moldovia (.md) have been recent targets - where law enforcement and phishing take-down groups may not have established contacts, according to researchers.

During the time it takes to establish contacts with the domain name registrars and have them take down the fraudulent Web domains, Rock Phish can continue to collect information.

"They’re the innovators in the phishing space," says Symantec’s Ramzan. "Whenever there’s a new technique that comes out, it can be traced back to the Rock Phish group."

IM-ing’ Divides Teens, Adults

Teenager Michelle Rome can’t imagine life without instant messaging. Baby boomer Steve Wilson doesn’t care that it even exists. They’re part of an "instant messaging gap" between teens and adults. And the division is wide, says an AP-AOL survey on how Americans use or snub those Internet bursts of gossip, happy date-making and teen tragedies that young people exchange by the hour while supposedly doing homework.

Rome, 17, a high school senior in Morristown, N.J., spends more than two

hours each day sending and receiving more than 100 instant messages, or "IM-ing." "I use it to ask questions about homework, make plans with people, keep up with my best friend in Texas and my sister in Connecticut," she said. "It has all the advantages."

The 51-year-old Wilson, a mechanic in Kutztown, Pa., prefers using e-mail and the telephone.

Instant messaging "is the worst of both worlds," he said. "It manages to combine all the things I don't like about each. I'm more or less a dinosaur. I use the Internet for things like buying car parts, reading celebrity gossip."

Almost half of teens, 48 percent of those ages 13-18, use instant messaging, according to the poll. That's more than twice the percentage of adults who use it.

According to the AP-AOL poll:

* Almost three-fourths of adults who do use instant messages still communicate with e-mail more often. Almost three-fourths of teens send instant messages more than e-mail.
* More than half of the teens who use instant messages send more than 25 a day, and one in five send more than 100. Three-fourths of adult users send fewer than 25 instant messages a day.
* Teen users (30 percent) are almost twice as likely as adults (17 percent) to say they can't imagine life without instant messaging.
* When keeping up with a friend who is far away, teens are most likely to use instant messaging, while adults turn first to e-mail.
* About a fifth of teen IM users have used IM to ask for or accept a date. Almost that many, 16 percent, have used it to break up with someone. The bug can be contagious at any age.

Faith Laichter, a 50-year old elementary school teacher from Las Vegas, says she started using instant messaging after watching her children.

"I do it more now," she said, boasting: "Sometimes I do two conversations at once."

That's nothing for young people who check their e-mail, download music and perform other tasks at the same time.

"It's kind of remarkable to watch," said Steve Jones, a professor of communications at the University of Illinois at Chicago. "They can keep half a dozen conversations or more going at the same time."

But that can be more of a distraction than an accomplishment, says Naomi Baron, a linguistics professor at American University.

"If you have 15 conversations going simultaneously," she said, "sometimes you're just throwing things out there and then dashing off to the next customer." A bow to the traditional: When sharing serious or confidential news, both teens and adults prefer to use the telephone, the poll said.

The survey of 1,013 adults and 500 teens was conducted online by Knowledge Networks from Nov. 30-Dec. 4. The margin of sampling error for the adults was plus or minus 4 percentage points, 5.5 points for teens.

Technology for instant messaging has been available to the general public for about a decade. Time Warner Inc.'s AOL, Yahoo Inc. and Microsoft

Corp.’s MSN are the major IM operators.

Patriots Quarterback Brady Sues Yahoo Over Ads

Star quarterback Tom Brady has sued Yahoo Inc., claiming that the Internet business used his image without his consent to advertise its fantasy football service.

Brady, who led the New England Patriots to three Super Bowl championships, is demanding Yahoo stop running the ads and is seeking unspecified damages, according to a lawsuit filed in federal court in Los Angeles.

A spokeswoman for Sunnyvale, Calif.-based Yahoo declined comment, saying it was company policy not to discuss pending litigation. Brady’s complaint says that he was prominently featured in ads in Sports Illustrated magazine as well as on the Yahoo Web site without the athlete’s permission.

Fantasy football is a game where sports fans assemble teams of real players from different NFL teams, competing against colleagues and friends in imaginary leagues. Their games are scored each week based on the individual performance of each of those players, with cash prizes often going to the winners.

In the lawsuit, Brady said the violation of his rights of publicity "was intentional, deliberate, willful and malicious."

Yahoo, which runs one of many fantasy football sites, offers a basic service at no cost, but charges up to $125 per season for access to advanced analysis tools and data.

The suit, which was filed November 20, says that Yahoo’s fantasy football Web site generates more than 800 million page views a day during the football season and is part of a $4 billion a year industry that attracts some 8 million consumers.

"Little Fatty" Unlikely Internet Hero In China

An overweight Chinese gas station attendant has become an unexpected celebrity after a picture of his portly face was posted on the Internet - and then started appearing on movie posters and in other unlikely places.

Nicknamed "Little Fatty," 19-year-old Qian Zhijun’s picture was loaded on to the Internet four years ago by a teacher.

His face - round, ruddy cheeked, with a drooping mouth and topped by a mop of black hair - has since replaced Jean Reno’s on a poster for the movie "The Da Vinci Code" and Johnny Depp’s for "Pirates of the Caribbean," to name just two.

Though famous now and having appeared extensively in Chinese media, Qian says he was rather upset when he first saw his photo being made fun of on the Web.

"Now my feeling has changed. If you always feel depressed, then you feel

uncomfortable. Now I can view this event with a calm mind, and I feel released," said Qian.

He has an official Web site (www.xiaopang.cn) run by friend Gao Feng, which operates as a forum for overweight people and offers tips on healthy eating and dieting.

Qian, who loves cooking, hopes to use his fame to launch a career in the media, saying he wants to work as a host for a television cooking program or report on gourmet restaurants.

He even has impersonators. Recently he was joined by six of them - along with a dozen belly dancers - who imitated his unique facial expression.

This Holiday, Send Them An E-card

Paper Christmas cards with family photos may be traditional, but they’re "old media." The new media alternative: electronic Christmas cards with video.

At photo-sharing site Webshots.com, users who have already created an online photo album can send a free e-Christmas card featuring a slide show that combines digital photos and digital video clips. At OneTrueMedia.com, users can do the same thing, and even add holiday music, graphics and stock art to fill out their video montage.

"This is the holiday season where people will be (video sharing) for the first time," says Martin Green, Webshots general manager. "We have 15 million members, and when we asked what they wanted, this is what they told us: the ability to string photos and videos together."

These services are so new that there’s not much tracking data yet, but the expectation, based on the growth of online photo sharing, is that millions of people will be choosing video holiday greetings by next Christmas. Brett Gardner, marketing vice president at OneTrueMedia, says thousands of holiday montages were uploaded to that site in the past week.

Creators of the e-cards can send them by e-mail or use the free player feature on OneTrueMedia and embed the card on their blog or MySpace page. Another option: For a fee, users can burn their montage on a DVD ($24.99 for the first disc, less for additional discs) and send it to family and friends.

Webshots even offers tips on how to make a holiday video montage, covering such things as lighting (avoid fluorescent), costumes (the campier, the better) and performance (a rousing round of Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer will kill). The top piece of advice: Keep it short - under three minutes is best.

=~=~=~=

Atari Online News, Etc. is a weekly publication covering the entire Atari community. Reprint permission is granted, unless otherwise noted at the beginning of any article, to Atari user groups and not for profit publications only under the following terms: articles must remain unedited and include the issue number and author at the top of each article reprinted. Other reprints granted upon approval of request. Send requests to: dpj@atarinews.org

No issue of Atari Online News, Etc. may be included on any commercial media, nor uploaded or transmitted to any commercial online service or internet site, in whole or in part, by any agent or means, without the expressed consent or permission from the Publisher or Editor of Atari Online News, Etc.

Opinions presented herein are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the staff, or of the publishers. All material herein is believed to be accurate at the time of publishing.